

Past, Present, & Future: The Road to Reducing Flooding Problems

What's the problem?

Flooding has occurred within the Chehalis River Basin repeatedly, affecting Lewis, Thurston, and Grays Harbor counties. Significant flooding occurred in 1972, 1975, 1986, 1990, 1996, 2007, and 2009. These floods have disrupted the lives of thousands of residents, and have caused millions of dollars of damage to homes and businesses. Most will remember that Interstate 5 was closed for multiple days through Centralia and Chehalis during the most recent floods. These closures all but halted interstate commerce and highlighted the magnitude of the flooding problem for the region, the state, and beyond.

What's being done?

Recent, repeated flooding has made it clear that a coordinated effort to address flooding in Lewis, Thurston, and Grays Harbor Counties is needed. As a result, a Flood Authority was formed in 2008 among eleven jurisdictions within the Chehalis River Basin. The Washington State Legislature appropriated \$2.5 million for the Flood Authority to perform a basin-wide study of flood issues. An additional \$47.5 million has been set aside by the Legislature for flood control projects.

Who serves on the Flood Authority?

The Flood Authority consists of elected officials and representatives from:

Grays Harbor, Lewis, and Thurston Counties; the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation; the Cities of Aberdeen, Centralia, Chehalis, Montesano, and Oakville; and the Towns of Bucoda and Pe Ell.

With the public's input the Flood Authority has developed a Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan. The Plan defines the basin's flooding problems and proposes potential solutions that the Flood Authority is interested in studying further before making final recommendations. The potential solutions consist of: major regional projects, such as levee construction and flood storage; projects to address specific, local problems; non-structural actions, such as public education and information, emergency response, and natural resource protection; recommended improvements that can be made to the floodplain regulations of member jurisdictions; and some projects that are already underway, such as an early warning system that will improve flood warning within the Basin. While the State has provided some money to help identify these projects, it is not a sufficient amount to address all of the problems within the Basin. The Flood Authority is currently considering a number of options for forming a flood district, which will have the ability to raise additional necessary funding, coordinate flood reduction efforts, provide necessary legal means to select projects for funding, and to oversee their construction.

What's next?

The Flood Authority has reached a preliminary agreement to form a Watershed Management Partnership. This approach provides the Flood Authority with flexibility regarding governance, allocation of costs, and funding. In summary, it allows the Flood Authority to start small on an agreed set of projects; the Flood Authority can then decide whether or not they want to keep the Partnership or enter into a more formal arrangement via a multi-county Flood Control Zone District (FCZD). The FCZD approach requires that the Flood Authority make choices about who governs the district and whether they are elected or appointed, whether it is managed through existing or new utilities, whether there is uniform or area-specific charges, etc. The Flood Authority will make a recommendation to the Commissioners of each County, who must approve either approach. Prior to that decision, the Flood Authority will be holding public meetings to provide more information about and get feedback on district formation.

What does it mean?

Simply put, the region must address its flooding problems to protect people and property and to support economic and social health. The governments of the region are committed to working together to effectively and efficiently implement solutions that reduce flooding. These solutions have costs that must be shared by the people that live within the Chehalis Basin. Others less directly impacted (i.e., the State) may contribute but it is only fair that the people most directly impacted by flooding pay for some portion of the projects that will benefit them.

The Flood Authority, like the rest of the people who live within the Chehalis River Basin, is eager to get going on flood reduction projects. However, they realize the need to balance flood reduction with the current economic situation. Regardless of the approach used to form and manage a flood district, the Flood Authority will start slowly with smaller projects and will be conservative with the taxes or charges it collects to fund flood reduction projects. The Flood Authority realizes that it is too costly and difficult to prevent all flooding damage and believes a more reasonable approach is to reduce flood problems.

How can you get involved?

The Flood Authority has, and will continue to, keep the public informed and involved. They will be holding public meetings in the Basin this fall and in early 2011. The fall public meetings will provide opportunities to learn more about the district formation process and to give input on the key issues related to district formation. The early 2011 meetings will focus on the Interlocal Agreement that will direct how the flood district will operate, the taxes and/or charges it proposes to collect, district boundaries, and flood reduction project priorities. You can also learn more about the Flood Authority and district formation by attending Flood Authority meetings. Information about these meetings and other information and documents is available at:

<http://lewiscountywa.gov/communitydevelopment/chehalis-river-basin-flood-authority>

Need more information?

Need contact info:

Person and/or dedicated email address and phone #

Did you know?

According to a 2009 survey conducted within Grays Harbor, Lewis, and Thurston Counties that:

- 9 out of 10 respondents reported some flood impacts (road closures, work or school schedules impacted, extended power outages).
- 97% agreed that flooding affects more than just the people whose property is flooded.
- 91% agreed that preventing flood damage is critical to the well being of the Basin.
- 85% said spending up front to minimize flood damage was more effective than

Flood Authority Timeline

